

STANDING HEEL-TOE ROCKING

Heel-Toe Rocking is a great addition to other activities. It mimics the heel-to-toe pattern used in gaits and is similar to some common balance challenges (getting something from a top shelf, for example). The balance challenge for them is to feel and control this kind of rocking and rhythmical motion.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Strengthens the entire lower leg.
- ⦿ Requires upper body awareness and control.
- ⦿ Provides a difficult balance challenge.

Set It Up »

You will not need any special equipment for this exercise.

How to Do It »

The Start

- ⦿ Participants should stand tall with feet offset, shoulder-width apart, and the knees soft.
- ⦿ Ask them to hold onto a walker or a handrail, or stand between two sturdy chairs for support as needed.
- ⦿ Before starting, have participants practice the two individual parts of this activity:
 - Rolling forward onto the balls of their feet and back down.
 - Pulling up their toes (forefoot, actually) a few times. Have them do the front foot first, then the back foot, and then both. Cue them to hold on to their balance support firmly. This is a tough balance challenge.

This practice time gives them a chance to experience how combining the two moves will work for them.

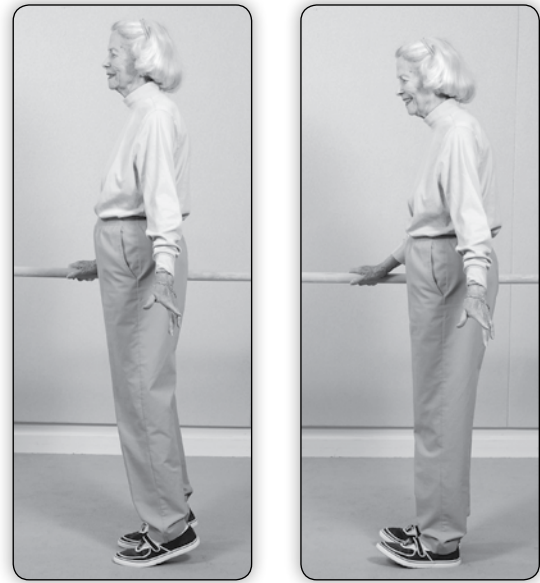
The Moves

Use the following cues.

- ⦿ With feet in offset position, begin a rocking motion:
 - Rock forward up onto the balls of the feet.
 - Balance just a moment in this position.
 - Lower the heels.
 - Rock backward just a bit so weight on the heels is enough that they can lift their forefoot.
 - At first, just lift one forefoot, then the other.
 - Gradually progress to lifting both forefeet.
- ⦿ Repeat the full rocking motion 8 to 12 times, as tolerated.

Give It More Balance »

- Position the feet parallel, hip-width apart. This narrows the base of support. Do heel-toe rocking in this position.
- Cue participants to gaze ahead, not down. A horizon-level visual target helps them maintain balance.
- Encourage them to notice how the rocking motion feels.
- As they improve at this rocking activity, suggest that they lessen their balance support. They can hold onto the chair lightly, instead of tightly, for example.
- Add an overhead arm lift at the top of each heel lift.
- Dim the lights, just enough to make them a little unnerved; but still able to see. Reducing visual input gets them to focus more on somatic and vestibular sensations.



Keep It Safe »

Unless your group is quite capable, rocking backward should be done individually, with your personal supervision at first. They can take turns with you at their side or holding their hands. Keeping their back close to a wall is another way to make this activity safer. Rocking backward onto the heels is especially difficult and can be unnerving at first. Don't insist they do this part, if they are uncomfortable or look very rocky doing it. Allow them to use as much balance support as they feel they need.

Participants tend to bend at the waist and drop their hips back when you ask them to rock backward. Cue them to maintain upright posture and keep their hips over their ankles throughout.